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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ABUJA 001547

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [ETRD](#) [BEXP](#) [KCRM](#) [MASS](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AFTERNOON TEA WITH PRESIDENT OBASANJO

REF: A. 00 ABUJA 1783

[B](#). ABUJA 1531

[C](#). ABUJA 1449

[D](#). ABUJA 1446

[E](#). LAGOS 1755

(U) Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter; Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

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SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

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[1](#). (C) After a several-week hiatus, Ambassador Jeter met with President Obasanjo for a relaxed, Saturday afternoon tea at the President's residence on June 30. A very positive and wide-ranging discussion ensued which included security assistance (Operation Focus Relief and MPRI), law enforcement issues (crime in Lagos, FATF, counter-narcotics and extradition), the Delta, inter-communal violence in Nasarawa State, Obasanjo's planned September travel to the U.S., new leadership for the OAU and ECOWAS, AGOA.

[2](#). (SBU) Ambassador Jeter was accompanied to the meeting by his Staff Assistant (notetaker). The President's Principal Secretary Stephen Oronsaye was also in attendance.

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36 STATES: THE GOOD, THE BAD. . .

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[3](#). (C) Ambassador Jeter began the discussion by noting that he had just visited Sokoto and Kebbi State (Ref C and D). The President noted that the Governor of Kebbi State, Alhaji Mohammed Aleiro, had recently been to see him, complaining that he was losing control of the mallams (Islamic religious leaders). President Obasanjo, chuckling, recounted that he had suggested that Governor Aleiro stop giving them money while explaining to them that the President was coming to visit, and the money had to be put toward projects. The excuse would be that the President wanted to commission as many projects in Kebbi as he had in Sokoto. "After my visit," the President said he told the Governor, "just don't resume giving them any."

[4](#). (C) President Obasanjo, jovially noting that it was good that the Ambassador was "getting out to visit Nigeria's different regions," began to order the States he believed the Ambassador should visit, based on his view of the quality of State leadership. The President listed, in descending order, Katsina (Governor Yar'adua), Kaduna (Governor Makarfi - "he's a good boy"), Adamawa (Governor Haruna), Rivers (Governor Odili), Cross Rivers (Governor Duke), Bauchi (Governor Mu'azu), Plateau (Governor Dariye), Oyo (Governor Adesina - "Lam is the best of the AD governors"), and Benue (Governor Akume).

[5](#). (C) Huffing, President Obasanjo then added that Delta State (Governor Ibori) and Edo State (Governor Igbiniedion) were "the worst."

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Nasarawa Update

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[6](#). (C) Ambassador Jeter raised the recent communal violence in Nasarawa, that reportedly had displaced tens of thousands of people. The President said he too had heard that 40,000 people had been displaced as a result of inter-communal violence (Ref B). He further added that three police officers had been killed, and three were missing. President Obasanjo said that if he were asked to explain the reasons for the conflict, he would not be able to do so, except that it was a very old conflict between a people who see

themselves as indigenous to the land (Jukun) and see the Tiv as invaders. The President further noted that the Tivs were an aggressive people, who had the reputation of taking over wherever they went. Ambassador Jeter elicited a knee-slapping laugh from the President when he rhetorically noted that General Malu was a Tiv. President Obasanjo concluded by characterizing Nasarawa State Governor Adamu as one who "behaves and talks maturely," and indicated that he believed the inter-communal violence would be brought under control.

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AGOA
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17. (SBU) Ambassador Jeter noted that he had met recently with the Minister of Commerce, and had attended the Vice President's opening of the Ministry's AGOA office on June 29. Nigeria had not yet met all of the requirements of AGOA, such as establishing a visa regime but there was clearly interest and efforts being made to do so. The President stated that Minister Bello wanted to begin selling inputs to countries that had already qualified under AGOA, and asked the Ambassador if that was acceptable. Ambassador Jeter said that as far as he knew it was, but that it was also important that Nigeria finish meeting the requirements to receive the full benefits of AGOA. The President agreed, and explained that he had set an output target for goods under AGOA. In response to Minister Bello's request to sell inputs to qualified countries, the President had agreed but had doubled the target Minister Bello had to meet.

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Security Assistance
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18. (C) TRUCKS: The Ambassador informed the President that cooperation between the Embassy and the Army on Operation Focus Relief (OFR) had improved greatly in recent months, and that 1 Battalion (Birnin-Kebbi), 20 Battalion (Serti) and 222 Battalion (Ilorin) had been selected for OFR P3 training. However, there were several issues that needed quick attention and resolution. Ambassador Jeter informed the President that the trucks delivered to Nigeria during OFR P1 had still not been sent to Sierra Leone, and that the two "missing" trucks were still, in fact, missing. A visibly upset Obasanjo stated that he had wanted to deal personally with the issue of the missing trucks, but that NSA Mohammed had urged the President to allow him to resolve the issue. Turning to his Principal Secretary, the President proceeded to dictate a memo to the NSA. His composition to the NSA stated that he was upset that the issue had not been resolved as promised, and demanded resolution and a report by July 4. Turning to the Ambassador, President Obasanjo said that if the NSA did not report resolution by July 4, he would deal with the missing trucks personally. The Ambassador emphasized that unless all of the trucks from OFR P1 were delivered to Sierra Leone, the U.S. could not send new trucks for the units training in Phase 3. The President agreed, saying, "Naturally," and added that shipping the trucks was easy to accomplish and would be done.

19. (C) FOB: The Ambassador raised the need for a decision on a forward operating base (FOB) for OFR P3, and noted that the Air Force Base in Abuja had been discussed for many months; however, the Embassy had yet to receive a confirmation that the Abuja base would be acceptable to the military. The President asked Oronsaye to make a note for him to raise the issue with Minister of Defense Danjuma.

10. (C) MPRI: The Ambassador explained that the MPRI payment had been made, but that it had come up short by approximately USD 320,000. The President asked if that was due to fluctuating exchange rates, and waving his hand, said that it would be resolved. The more fundamental concern regarding MPRI, the Ambassador said, was that counterparts had still not been assigned for all of the team. This could be a very useful program for the Ministry and the military, Ambassador Jeter emphasized, but not until real cooperation existed. President Obasanjo firmly agreed that the program could be of great benefit, but said, "I don't think our people understand it well." He noted that he had discussed the program with members of the Services during a military retreat in Kaduna, and it was clear from the questions that there was a lack of understanding. However, he would meet the week of July 2 with the new Chief of Army Staff (Major General Ogomudia), whom he described as "a man you can work with," unlike Lieutenant General Malu who "had a chip on his shoulder" and had "outgrown his shoes." "Just don't worry," he told the Ambassador.

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DRUGS, THUGS AND LAUNDERING

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11. (C) FATF: Turning to law enforcement issues, Ambassador Jeter raised the FATF finding, and noted that he wanted to make sure the President was aware of the seriousness of the issue to Nigeria's image. A visibly consternated Obasanjo said that the Minister of Justice had failed to act, and that he had reprimanded an apologetic Bola Ige during a recent Council of State meeting. (NOTE: After the meeting concluded, Oronsaye reiterated to the Ambassador the level of the President's frustration over the confusion and lack of action by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Finance. END NOTE.)

12. (S) NDLEA SUPPLEMENTAL: Ambassador Jeter noted how pleased we were with the cooperation we were experiencing with the NDLEA. However, the Ambassador also told the President that the Embassy was concerned that the NDLEA had only received 350m Naira in the supplemental budget, instead of the requested 2.2b Naira. It was clear, the Ambassador noted, that the agency could not do its business without the resources, and that the size of the expected supplemental (2.2b Naira) had helped push Nigeria over the top during the 2000 annual narcotics certification process. A surprised Obasanjo, in reference to certification, said, "We're not done? We have to do it again?" The Ambassador explained that certification was an annual process. The President rolled his eyes, and said, "God must be God of Obasanjo. After what I did last time (in reference to the renditions), if the press had found out they would have torn me apart." He then said that NDLEA would get more money, and asked, "If I give them another 350 million -- Is that okay?" The Ambassador responded that the key was that NDLEA be able to operate effectively.

13. (C) EXTRADITION: The Ambassador noted that, in terms of counter-narcotics certification, the Embassy was working with the Ministry of Justice and others to develop a workable extradition process. One piece would include training for prosecutors, and perhaps some judges, to serve on an extradition court. However, Nigeria would have to create such a court. Ambassador Jeter asked if such a court could be created. President Obasanjo responded that he would create it if allowed by the NDLEA enabling act. However, he said, Nigeria needed assistance in the form of training. In a dismissive response to a reference to AG Ige's and Chief Judge Belgore's statements that such a court could be created (Ref A), an animated Obasanjo said "Belgore is the most corrupt judge in Nigeria. I will have to be very careful when I replace him in July."

14. (C) LAGOS CRIME: Ambassador Jeter said he recently had seen Lagos State Governor Tinubu on the crime situation in Lagos. The situation had our people, and many other diplomats in Lagos, very afraid. There had been two carjackings of Embassy vehicles, and one Nigerian police escort had been killed. President Obasanjo said he was aware of the situation, and that it would be taken care of. (NOTE: The President implied that he had a solution in mind, but did not reveal his plans. END NOTE.)

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THE OIL BUSINESS

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15. (C) DELTA AND OIL: The Ambassador noted that recent events in the Delta had raised some concern, particularly the hostage situation at the Exxon-Mobil Bonny Island facility (Ref E). The President said, "Leave it with me," implying that he had some action in mind, but not giving any hint of what it might be. The Ambassador then raised the oil block production sharing contracts (PSC) bidding process, and noted that some of the companies had expressed concerns the process seemed to have stalled. The President stated that he did not deal with commercial issues except to approve or disapprove a recommended action. Gruffly waving his hand, he told the Ambassador that he too should not get involved.

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OAU, ECOWAS, AND DELE-COLE

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16. (C) The President stated that Nigeria would support the Namibian candidate, Foreign Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab, in his

bid for Secretary General of the OAU. Ambassador Jeter noted that Ambassador Kouyate was also seeking the post. President Obasanjo said that Kouyate was a good man, but that before Salim-Salim, all of the Secretary Generals had been from West Africa and had been Francophone, so Nigeria was supporting a candidate from southern Africa. Turning to ECOWAS, Ambassador Jeter said that he hoped a replacement for Kouyate could be found who could match Kouyate's skills, drive and stature. Praising Kouyate, the President said that if he had his way, Kouyate would stay on in his present post. However, he noted, Kouyate had decided to leave. That being the case, Obasanjo said that the Chairmanship should remain Francophone, but that the Executive Secretary could be an Anglophone.

17. (SBU) Ambassador Jeter asked the President if he had selected a replacement for Patrick Dele-Cole, the President's former Special Advisor on International Affairs and Nigeria's former Ambassador to Brazil (who was released during the cabinet shake-up in early June). The President said he had not yet decided if he would replace Dele-Cole, but if he decided to, the replacement would be Ad'obe Obe. Obasanjo described Obe as relaxed, bright and forthcoming. (COMMENT: Obe presently serves as the President's Personal Assistant and Speechwriter. While lamenting the departure of Dele-Cole, Embassy has a similar impression of Obe to that of the President, and believes he will be accessible and a close confidant. END COMMENT.)

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MESSAGES FOR WASHINGTON
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18. (C) Ambassador Jeter asked the President if he had any messages he wanted to convey to Washington. President Obasanjo said he had little to convey, except that he was "really satisfied" with the state of the bilateral relationship. He then noted that he was anticipating an invitation from President Bush to visit Houston in September, where he expected to meet with former President Bush (the Elder), host a meeting of "Nigerians in the Diaspora" and speak at the Baker Institute. The President also noted that he planned to attend the Corporate Council on Africa Summit in Philadelphia in September, and to speak at Johns Hopkins on health care during that same trip.

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SAA FLIGHT ISSUES
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19. (C) SAA FLIGHT ISSUES: After the meeting with the President concluded, Ambassador Jeter raised the high number of turn-arounds on the South Africa Airways flight from Lagos to New York with Oronsaye. The Ambassador noted that the MOU on INS presence at MMIA was presently being cleared through the GON and that the Embassy was looking into INS training for Nigerian Immigration. In the meantime, however, there was a clear need for additional NDLEA presence at the airport to monitor the flight. Ambassador Jeter strongly emphasized the importance of the flight for Nigeria's image and any future hope of a U.S. carrier establishing a direct flight between the U.S. and Nigeria. Oronsaye resolutely agreed, thanked the Ambassador for informing him of the issues at hand, and promised to inform the President.

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COMMENT
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20. (C) The Ambassador and President had not met since the President's trip to Washington. The intent of the meeting was to catch up on various issues of mutual concern. President Obasanjo was interested, friendly and animated, particularly on security assistance. However, we were surprised by his continued lack of understanding of the certification process, and his lack of detailed knowledge on the conflict in Nasarawa State (Ref B and previous). However, the President appeared engaged and cooperative on nearly every issue. Ambassador will meet with NSA Mohammed on July 2 and raise a different set of issues following on President Obasanjo's May visit to Washington (septel). Jeter